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WHAT IF A DAY

The publication of the *Shirburn Ballads* has brought us another proof of the popularity of this song. The form in which it occurs in that collection (No. LIX) calls for no special remark: with here and there a scribal difference, it is the same as No. XII of my paper (*Modern Philology*, IV, 3), that is to say the version of the *Roxburgh Ballads*. The song is headed by an editor's note, which winds up as follows: "The verses are found also in a Bodleian MS, MS Rawlinson poet. 112, fol. 9, and are there attributed to 'E. of E.?' Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex." The summary catalogue of this MS says: "foll. 9, 10, 11, 'Verses or English poemes written by the Lo: the E[arl] of E[ssex], beginning 'There was a time when seely bees could speake,' and (on 'The fickle state of our uncertayn life') 'What if a day.'" It would seem that Mr. Clark has relied on this remark. At least the librarian informs me that "the poem is on f. 10*v* and f. 11; is not headed by any attribution, and that the verses attributed to the E. of E. are on f. 9 and in a different hand." The earl of Essex lived from 1567-1601 so that, even if the note also referred to "What if a Day," "written by the E. of E." can only mean "copied by the E. of E.," or else must be considered as a faulty statement, as the same reason that prevents us from considering Campion as the author also prevents us from considering the earl of Essex as such.

In itself the version is a very interesting one. It will be seen at a glance that it differs from all others in counting four stanzas; all other versions have two, three, five or more.

Stanza i belongs to the group beginning "What if a day, a month or a year," and to that having in the fifth line "Fortune, honour, beauty, youth." It agrees closely with the version in Farr's *Select Poetry* (No. XI of my paper), as does stanza ii. So far there is nothing striking; Stanza iii, however, also agrees with the version in Farr's *Select Poetry*, and occurs nowhere else, while

Stanza iv is like the third stanza in *Rich. Wigley's Commonplace Book*, only differing slightly in the last lines. To recapitulate: our version is, leaving out of account a few minor variants, identical with Farr's version (which itself differs from all others in bringing a new third stanza), but adds a fourth stanza which up to now has only been found in *Rich. Wigley's Commonplace Book*.

Evidently there is a parody on "What if a Day" in "A Droll," printed on p. 41 of *Merry Drollery, Complete*, edited by T. Woodfall Ebsworth, 1875. Its closing lines are:

Let us sing, let us laugh;
Let us drink, let us quaff;
See the world is sliding,
Here is no abiding,
Our life's but a Hollyday.

GRONINGEN

A. E. H. SWAEN

(f. 10b)

THE FICKLE ESTATE OF OUR
UNCERTAIN LYFE TO A
PLEASAUNT NEW TUNE.

What if a day or A moneth or a yeare
Crowne thy delightes
with a thowsand wisht contentinges?
May not the chaunce of A night or an houre
Crosse those delightes,
With as many sad tormentinges?
Ffortune, honor, beuty, youth,
Are but blossomes dying:
Wanton pleasures doteing love,
Are but shadowes flying,
All our ioyes are but toyes
Idle thoughtes deceyueing,
None haue powre in an houre
Of our lyves bereaueing.

The earth is but A poynt of ye world, & A man
Is but a poynte
Of the earthes¹ compared Center
Shall then a poynt of A poynt be soe vayne

¹tes. Blot in MS.

As to triumph
 In a¹ seely pointes Adventure.
 All is hazard that we haue,
 There is nothing bydeing:
 Dayes of pleasures are but streames,
 Through fayre meddowes glideinge.
 Weale or woe time doth goe
 In tyme ther's noe returninge,
 Secret fates guyde our states
 Both in mirth and mourninge.

- (f. 11) What shall A man desyre in this worlde
 Seing ther's naught,
 In this world, that is worth desyreing!
 Let not a man cast his eyes to the earth,
 But to the heavens
 With his thoughtes high aspyring.
 Thinke that liveing thou must dye,
 Be assured thy dayes be told:
 Though on earth thou seemest to bee
 Assure thy self thou art but molde.
 All our wealth bringes noe health,
 But returnes from whome it came;
 Soe shall we all agree,
 If we be the very same.

Goe seely note to ye eares of my deare,
 Make thy self blest
 And in swetest passions languish.
 Lay thee to sleepe on the brest of her harte
 Giue her delight,
 Though thy self be made of Anguish.
 There where thou arte then speake of mee
 That from thence am banisht:
 Saye that once I had content,
 Though that it be vanisht.
 Yet when tyme doth runne backe,
 And tyme passed doth renne;
 She shall cease to be fayre
 And I will liue to be true.

Finis

¹ Canceled in MS.